



CARLETON WIGGINS

THE BUCOLIC MOOD IN PAINTING

BY GEORGE PARSONS LATHROP

With original illustrations by Carleton Wiggins.

It appears to me a most fortunate dispensation that cattle are not "instantaneous," but deliberate. In our snap-shot era, when every phase or quickest transition of movement is recorded by the camera, stamped upon a gelatine ribbon, and reproduced in the kinetoscope; and when "the horse in motion" has leaped into the arena of fine art with a complete new repertory of acrobatic feats and astonishing leg-entanglements—it is quite a relief to observe that oxen and cows are still calm and sagacious enough to evade all such complications.

This is an age of over-activity, of perhaps morbid haste. At any rate, Dr. Max Nordau tells us that in literature, the drama, music,



THE SPOTTED BULL

we have arrived at a time of degeneracy, that we are all hysterical; and it is not risking much to say that there are symptoms of excessive nervousness in some branches of the graphic arts. Amid all this hurry, there is refreshment, as I have hinted, in the repose of the cow. A great deal of the dignity and self-respecting quietude of classic antiquity persists in the

modern cow; and even in the bull, when he is not being tortured in the ring, or doing his popular though dreaded mad-scene in the open fields.

Do we not know that one of the most admiring Homeric phrases or epithets applied to Juno, was "ox-eyed?" What large calm orbs the term suggests!



A RAINY DAY ON THE HILLS

Strange though it may seem, then, to the unreflecting, the cow and ox are often much more Greek than many of the equally undraped human figures that flit through our pictorial art of to-day, as special deputies to represent the Hellenic spirit. And the cow and the ox are not, like people, unreflecting. They meditate, or at least ruminate. They reflect themselves in pasture-pools, as Carleton Wiggins de-

monstrates to us, if we have not seen it with our own eyes. They also reflect credit upon the painter, and enjoyment upon the spectator.

Carleton Wiggins is a native of Orange County, N. Y., and began the study of painting in New York City in 1870, under George Inness. One may trace now, I think, in the landscape portions of his work, and in the whole effect aimed at, something of that sturdy yet poetic American master's influence for "tone." The first ten years of the young man's work were devoted to landscape entirely. Then, spending some time on one occasion on a farm where the scenery did



RETURNING HOME



IN THE MARSHES

not interest him, but live-stock was abundant, he employed himself in studying the animals instead, but with no idea that this was at all likely to become his specialty. Introducing domestic animals into his pictures on a small scale, at first, he gradually enlarged his treatment of them and gave it more detail; until, having gone to Paris in 1880, he exhibited at the Salon of 1881 a large sheep-picture that seems to have settled the direction of his career.

France proved to be so attractive to him that it kept him for a year and a half, during which he painted a great deal at Barbison, and also made studies in Normandy. The "Street in Barbison," accompanying this article, and the sketches of ox-carts and hay-wagons in Normandy, are reminiscences of that period. So, too, his painting, the "Ploughing in Normandy," in the spring exhibition of the Academy of Design this year, represents the fruition of his work and observation there, fourteen years ago.

The "Spotted Bull," reproduced in these pages, is a strong example of his manner of presenting the powerful master of the herd. Another superb picture in the same order is the "Holstein Bull," painted in the autumn of 1893, and exhibited at the Academy in the

spring of last year. It was bought from the artist's studio, and the purchaser has presented it to the Metropolitan Museum, whither it is about to be transferred. The "Holstein Bull" is a model of young tauric nature. He is, in the brute world, a parallel to some youthful Greek athlete not yet grown into redundancy of muscle or general bulk. His head is held slightly upward; he is not posing for effect; he is simply the embodiment of unconscious, adolescent strength. A gentle, but well modeled slope of land, dipping down toward a line of soft, mossy trees behind him, forms an admirable background. From one side the warm late-afternoon light strikes straight upon his head and



ON THE HIGHWAY



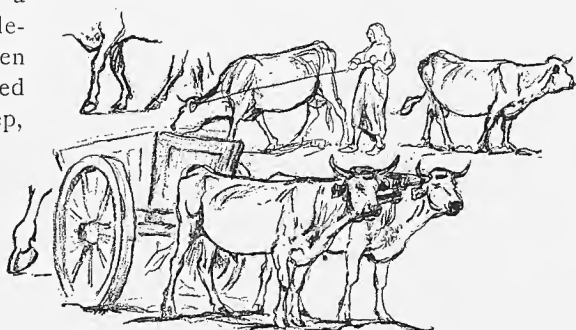
IN NORMANDY

forefront and passes under his body, which casts backward a broad strong shadow.

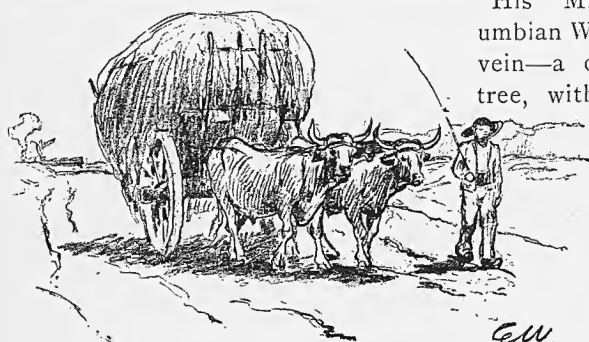
The management of lights is one of Mr. Wiggins's points of skill. He contrives in this way to invest the quietest of subjects with a little drama of illumination which is full of interest, charm and surprise, without ever becoming theatrical or unnatural. This is shown in a

small color-sketch in his studio, depicting a green-embowered sunken road, through which a blue-bloused man is driving a flock of sheep, while the sun-light on the banks of the road and through the trees appears in spots of gem-like brilliancy. A large and well-known instance of the same thing is the picture called "The Wanderers," owned by the Hamilton Club, of Brook-

lyn. It represents two calves, a white and a black-and-white, in shadow, coming forward along a wood-path amid thick-boled trees and rich verdure, with sunlight showering in upon the scene in most effective contrast.



SOME SKETCHES OF OXEN



DRAWING HAY IN NORMANDY

His "Midsummer," exhibited at the Columbian World's fair, depicted—in similar vein—a cow standing under an apple-tree, with sunshine falling upon her in tremulous, changing spots.

No one should infer, however, from what has been said, that there is a sameness or monotony in the works of this artist. They display, indeed, a wide range and variety in his chosen field. Witness his "Rainy Day on the

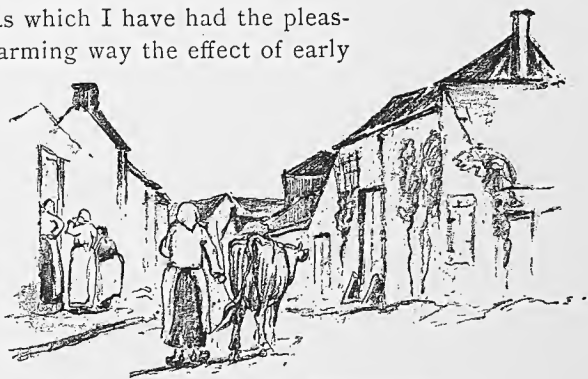
Hills," given here; and "In the Marshes," with its watery distances. Another and the latest of his works, derived from impressions of the heavy snows of last winter, is in a wholly different mood and key; portraying, with much delicacy and in subdued yet definite tones, a sudden thick snowfall near an orchard and out-houses, with a farmer, in the open foreground, bringing out feed to the sheep that have been overtaken by the storm.

Still another phase is illustrated in the artist's "Breezy Day," where a pair of cattle is seen standing by a marsh-pool, the tall, coarse grass around which is ruffled by the short, sharp wind. It is full of quick



RUMINATION

vigor. A still unfinished canvas which I have had the pleasure of seeing brings out in a charming way the effect of early morning, with reddish and black-and-white cattle standing around a group of tall, pointed hayricks in the centre. The ricks are suffused with faintly violet shadow, a dewy mist hangs over the pasture in the background, and above the whole scene is spread a thick yellowish mottled sky. Nothing could convey better the sweet freshness of early day among the kine and the grass and gathered hay, drying fragrantly in the sun.



A NORMANDY VILLAGE-STREET

From the landscape-studies on Long Island and in Normandy, here reproduced, one can see that Mr. Wiggins's preference is for calm and peaceful, often rather simple and level, expanses or conformations of ground. He is fond of tall or picturesquely disposed trees playing an intermediate part between earth and sky, instead of taking the chief or exclusive rôle. And, to satisfy him entirely, it would seem that there must always be evidences of cultivation, of the life of man and farm-beast, in the surroundings. It is quite in keeping with this taste that he should say, as he has told me, that he does not care for "action" in the animals he paints. That does not seem to him to accord with their nature. He prefers to depict them as they are seen ordinarily, in the course of their quiet, grazing, growing life, in a world of fresh air. And this view of his reinforces my suggestion at the beginning of this paper, that cattle are eminently reposeful, Greek or Roman in their sedateness, their proportioned grace of form and move-



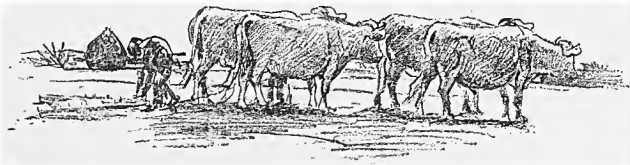
A SKETCH ON LONG ISLAND

ment, or in their impressive massiveness of outline.

Mr. Wiggins, in painting—in both his choice and treatment of subjects—represents a mood and tendency similar to the bucolics of Virgil or the prose-pastoral effects of Thomas

Hardy in modern fiction. It is good for us to have these things in art as well as in literature. They are restful, soothing, healthful to the mind.

How true he is to our American landscape is made apparent in his work, where the theme is American. But he confesses to a preference for painting in Europe, because of the greater facility of studying field-animals there, where the peasants own but two or three head of cattle each, and personally watch them in the field for two or three hours at a time; so that they are able and willing to keep them in about the same place and position, while the artist paints from them. Here in America he must enter the pasture unaided and follow the unattended beasts from point to point with great toil and many vexatious interruptions.



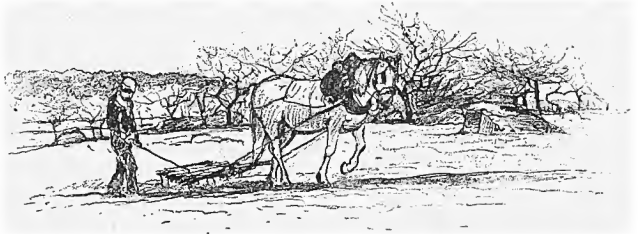
A FROSTY MORNING

others presents something worthy of consideration and comparison. Their style, however, is not what Mr. Wiggins aims at. His ideal is rather the harmonious tone, and luminous, serene, yet forceful completeness, of Troyon. There are few satisfactory animal-painters in the art-world to-day. Mr. Wiggins has given evidence of his ability to take a very high rank among them.

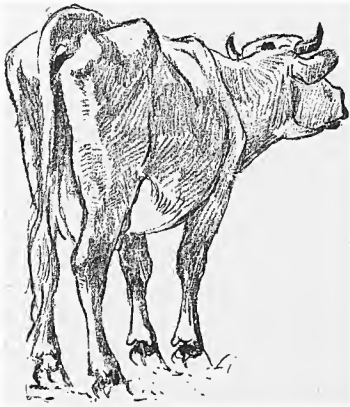
I believe that Mr. Wiggins will also, first, paint for a while in England; not for the sake of association with the English animal-painters, however, who are rather hard and mechanical in their effects, but for the sake of the riches of mellow, highly cultivated landscape there, and the solid and wholesome development of live-stock which appears to have been specially created to comfortably adorn the soft green pastures, or maintain the honor of some plain old English inn, rather than to compete with cheap and much-traveled American beef. Ploughing in northern Italy, where long strings of white oxen make themselves picturesque, in pass-



AMONG THE SHINNECOCK HILLS. A SKETCH FROM CAR-WINDOWS



PLOUGHING IN BARBISON, FRANCE



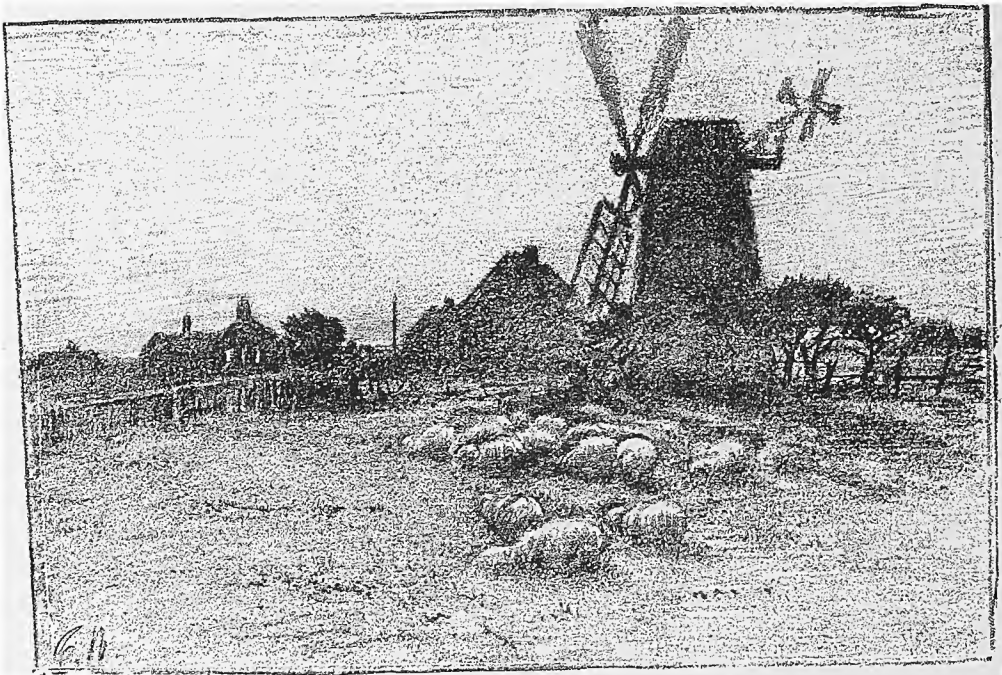
A QUICK SKETCH

ing before groups of black ilex-trees, may be another theme that will engage his attention next spring. It would seem that an enterprising painter of animal and of bucolic life, might produce a novel collection of pictures, very valuable and striking in their interest, by portraying the agricultural customs of different countries, with their characteristic surroundings; and perhaps something of this sort will gradually result from Mr. Wiggins's present foreign sojourn; although he has not expressly intimated it.

It seems to me that this artist, whose growth, if not precisely slow, has been quiet and unostentatious but full of vigor and solidity, possesses already an uncommon equipment for carrying out a wide range of work in a variety of moods and keys.

The "Moonlight," accompanying this article, apparently studied from an old East Hampton wind-mill, with a flock of moon-struck sheep huddled sleepily recumbent in the foreground, is a suggestive evidence of his versatility.

No doubt an artist can profit greatly by a study of the bucolic in different lands and under varying conditions. It is well, also, to be with and paint with painters of differing styles; not as a pupil, when one has got far past the pupil-stage, nor as an imitator, but as a learner: for it is self-evident that no useful and progressive artist can ever pass beyond the stage of learning. There come times, however, when the painter, like the writer, feels that he must refresh and brace his own powers by comparing them with men whose methods contain elements of strength.



MOONLIGHT